

Luang Por Sumedho, Abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery,

Meditation and Monastic Life - Vehicles for Liberation Ajahn Candasiri



In this article I will try to explain the extent to which monastic life is important in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism, and ways in which meditation is a support for our monastic life.

The primary aim of the Buddha's teaching is to free

the heart from the bond of ego-centred desires, arising through greed, hatred and delusion. His essential guidance was simple and direct: do good, refrain from evil, purify the heart. Another formulation is the Eightfold Path: right understanding; right intention; right speech, action and livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness and right concentration. It is a very complete and practical training for lay disciples as well as for monks and nuns. The first section points to an appreciation of the nature of our existence; more specifically suffering, its causes and what enables its cessation; the middle sections relate to our lives in community and in society; while the final sections concern the training of the mind - meditation being a primary means for this.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha spent the remaining forty-five years of his life guiding others towards perfect liberation; he encouraged his disciples to do the same. At first there was no formalized monastic rule; the people attracted to and living close to the Buddha already had a clear understanding of the means and purposes of his teaching and were able, as far as we can tell, to survive supported by lay practitioners, without difficulty. Later, as the Order grew, it began to attract people who lacked that understanding, so behaviour that was less congruent with the ideals of simplicity, renunciation and ethical principles began to be manifested in the community. At this point the Buddha decided to lay down the Patimokkha, a rule of training that, together with the stories behind each rule, fills several volumes. This is still the basis of our monastic life.

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The Cross and the Lotus

Christianity and Buddhism have guided people for millennia through the experience of suffering to the attainment of peace. Christianity focuses on the cross of Christ, and the redemption of resurrection. Buddhism begins with the suffering of everyday life and shows the release of relinquishing greed, hatred and delusion; the lotus is a flower of great beauty rising out of the mud. Both traditions have developed monastic paths that aid people on the way to peace, and can learn from each other's insights, 'rejoicing in the truth' (1 Cor.13:6).

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The nuns in a shrine room at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery.

The Buddha gave ten reasons for establishing the Patimokkha. Some were practical - it provided guidelines for maintaining the welfare of the community (Sangha) and its members. Also it promoted conduct that gave rise to faith in those who drew near and acted as a mirror for reflecting aspects of individuals' practice in need of attention.

One time, Ananda, the Buddha's attendant for many years, exclaimed that good companions constituted at least half of the Holy Life. The Buddha's response was, "Say not so, Ananda, noble friendship is the whole of the Holy Life" - because it supports the cultivation of the Eightfold Path. Later, at the time of his demise the Buddha told his disciples that he was leaving them the Dhamma Vinaya (the body of teaching and training structures) as a guide and support. Nowadays monastic training and community are very much emphasized within our own lineage but in fact this is unusual - most ordained people preferring a more independent lifestyle, even though it can mean considerable adaptation to the rule.

Sometimes people ask: "How much meditation do you do each day?" At first, when I tell them, "One hour in the morning and one hour in the evening", they seem surprised it's so little. Then, when I say, "But we try to make our whole life a meditation," they brighten - gladdened both by the wholeheartedness and accessibility of such an approach. Having lived as a nun in Buddhist monastic communities for more than twenty-six years, daily life is now

inseparable from 'meditation'.

So what, actually, is meditation? Clearly there are many styles of meditation. Some are technique-based - applying a clearly prescribed method to bring about a state of calm; others involve contemplation of an aspect of the teaching, or passage of scripture. For me, it is the cultivation of presence. Sometimes this includes a technique of contemplation but,

above all, it implies a willingness to notice and attend carefully to whatever is happening in the mind or body.

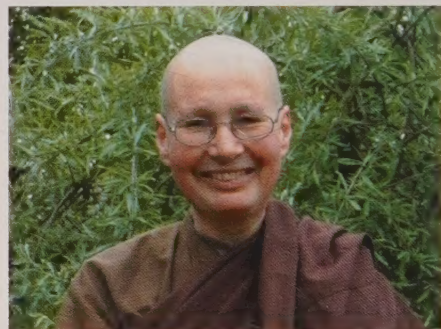
Some examples from my own practice may be helpful. One time a novice had been taking food from the kitchen for a sick nun, without permission. It was during our winter retreat and I began to worry about this. It became an obsession. Every time I sat down to meditate it would arise in my mind; every time I did walking meditation it was there - along with the voices of self disparagement: 'You wimp! You should speak to that novice about it, but you don't dare!' (She was a powerful lady). I tried to be aware of my feet on the path; I tried to calm the mind with the breath, but the monotonous refrain continued: 'You wimp! This is what you should do - but you can't!' Eventually I hit upon a strategy:- to name it - 'Worry' - and to deliberately fill the mind with this word as I stomped up and down: 'worry, worry, worry.... WORRY, WORRY, WORRY!' - I began to enjoy the rhythm; turning it into a game - and the power of the story line was dissipated... I no longer remember what happened about the food, the novice or the sick nun - I guess it all worked out in the end.

Another time there was to be a difficult meeting. I was dreading it, but rather than allowing the mind to anticipate and plan, I focused on my feet touching the ground (as in walking meditation) while walking to the meeting room. It was magical. By cultivating presence, rather than following the temptation to be drawn into compulsive planning, the mind remained clear - free of ideas of what might happen - and I was able to participate constructively in the meeting. It was, of course, quite different to anything I might have anticipated anyway.

One final example comes from my early monastic life, when I was still very much an individual with my own ways of doing things. A group of us were visiting a respected elder monk. Eager to impress, I hurried in and bowed to the monk - not noticing (or caring) that the other nuns were struggling to keep up. I

received some feedback about this, and noticed - on the next occasion we were to bow together - the voices of selfhood screaming inwardly: 'I can't bear this, I won't do it!' But then I did - I did bow, beautifully, in time with the other Sisters - and the voices went wonderfully quiet. It was all right. All that had died was a tiny bit of 'me' - the construction that is the cause of so much personal conflict and suffering.

I have found that the insights arising from regular meditation enable monastic life for, without appreciating the limitations of our humanity and the ultimate absence of selfhood, it would be too hard. Try as we might, we can never be 'perfect' - for more than an instant. Through meditation we learn to love, or at least to forgive, our failings and those of others. We learn to restrain harmful impulses and cultivate a place of inner ease from which what is good can flow forth. As a result we feel more at ease, and others too are affected by that sense of peacefulness. It's catching - just as a sense of strain and irritability can leave everyone feeling agitated and miserable! So, for me, sitting still in meditation is not an idle indulgence, it's a necessity - the very essence of religious life. *f*



Sister Candasiri was one of the first four nuns to join Ajahn Sumedho's newly established monastic community at Chithurst in 1979. Since then she has helped establish an order of nuns (Siladhara) both at Chithurst and at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery.

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Amaravati Buddhist Monastery



The Awakened Heart

Kevin SSF

It was a grey Friday afternoon in October 2005 when I arrived at Park Place Pastoral Centre run by the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Mary of the Angels. The centre is open to people of all faiths or none. I

had come to experience my first retreat with other members of the Awakened Heart Sangha; "A community of practitioners training in and transmitting the heart essence teachings of the Buddha," (*Course Companion*). The theme of the retreat "Spontaneous Activity from Outside Time."

The Awakened Heart Sangha has a long and respected lineage of teachers dating from the time of the historical Buddha through Guru Rinpoche who was believed to have conveyed the teachings of the Buddha to Tibet in the eighth century AD. The Sangha teaches Buddhism in general and the Dzogchen tradition in particular.

For many years I have had an interest in Buddhism particularly Theravada Buddhism. Approximately 18 months ago I participated in a Christian / Buddhist meditation retreat held at Sarum College. The retreat was led by a former Catholic nun who now lives near and works for The Awakened Heart Sangha.

Since then I have been slowly working my way through some of the course material produced by the Sangha and I attended my first retreat with other members of the community. I do not consider myself an expert on Christianity or Buddhism, and when it comes to Dzogchen I am a complete beginner. However I would like to share some thoughts on the insights and experiences I have gained from my explorations and how they nourish my life as a Christian and friar.

I cannot remember where I came across the following, "God's centre is everywhere. His circumference is nowhere." Openness or spaciousness is a significant precept taught by the Sangha; a principle that has begun to lead me towards a wider vision of God. This is not simply head knowledge; it is also personal experience based on a willingness to be open-minded and have my own assumptions and practices challenged.

Two simple examples of how my own meditation practice has changed: I have always meditated sitting cross-legged with my eyes closed and hands resting in my lap. It was suggested that I might like to try and sit with my hands resting on my thighs and the eyes neither shut nor fully open. In his book *Openness, Clarity, Sensitivity*, Rigdzin Shikpo explains the symbolism associated with this posture. "When you sit cross-legged with your eyes open and your arms out, there is nothing in front of you, so there is no protection. This expresses openness. There is a sense of being united with the environment and space: the opposite of closing off. The hands are not across the body which could symbolise an attempt to defend or protect yourself. Having them out, open, on the knees, expresses spaciousness."

Another reflective exercise I was

encouraged to practise at various times was to gently explore the sense of space; to ask where is the boundary, where is the centre? Can anything be truly boundless?

These seem such simple things yet I return to them time and again. It took my Buddhist friends to remind me of and reawaken me to the experience that "God's centre is everywhere, his circumference nowhere" and of the need to sit quietly, open and vulnerable before God.

The Awakened Heart:

"You open your awareness and your heart to God, the ultimate mystery, who dwells in the depth of your being, beyond the reach of the mind." (Father Thomas Keating)

*You open your awareness
and your heart to God,
the ultimate mystery,
who dwells in the depth
of your being*

I had the tendency to see God as the Father in heaven, somewhere up there existing outside of myself; it seems many Christians have this tendency. In his book *The New Creation In Christ*, Bede Griffiths highlights this in the following story about Father Jules Monchanin. "For many years he was a parish priest in Tannirpalli in Southern India. One day he approached a group of children and asked them, Where is God? The Hindu children pointed to the heart and said, God was there. The Christians pointed up to the sky." These are two different ways of understanding God and they are complementary.

Many Western thinkers and theologians demonstrate a bias towards the mind and rational thinking at the expense of the heart. It is as if the heart is always associated with irrationality or sentimentality and cannot be trusted. Buddhism seems to take a very different view. "The whole Buddhist tradition is based on the belief that we have within our being, within our heart, an awake quality, an inner wisdom which expresses itself as warmth and gentleness." (*Discovering The Heart of Buddhism*).

It is often said that the longest journey is from the head to the heart, and what a torturous journey that can be; there needs to be a restoration of the path that separates

them. As meditation practice deepens we re-discover that the heart and mind are not separate entities. There are many examples in scripture where the heart not the head or mind seems to be the centre of thought (1 Chronicles 29:18; Mark 2:6; Luke 2:19). Through awareness practice I have been encouraged to embrace all the qualities of heart and mind; as Shenpen (director of the community) says Both wisdom and compassion are heart and mind together."

Finally my encounter with Buddhism encourages my Christian life by offering challenges to my faith, to my theological understanding and ways of thinking. I am sometimes asked, "Are you a Christian or a Buddhist?" The answer is never easy. I know that I must point to Christ as the way of salvation; it is what I know and have found to be true. Whatever faith we are committed to, Christian, Buddhist, or Islam, the challenge is to live out our faith without dismissing the other great religions by which others have sought to know and love God.

I remain rooted in my Christian faith where I have found salvation, healing and fullness of life in Christ. Yet it is a joy to respectfully listen to and share in conversation with others who have found salvation, healing and fullness of life in Buddhism, Islam or any of the great traditions. There are no limits to the saving power of God; the Spirit will lead us to a fuller understanding over time.

"We do not want to be beginners, but let us be convinced that we will never be anything else but beginners all our life." (Thomas Merton)

On Sunday during the retreat sitting in the meditation room with my new Buddhist friends, listening to my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters singing the Mass in the chapel next door, I recall Shenpen's words "At least we are all on the road; some haven't started yet." We are on the road, members of different faiths sometimes travelling together, sometimes apart, but always beginners. *f*



Brother Kevin lives at Hilfield Friary. He has just completed a degree in Theology for Christian Ministry and Mission and hopes to be ordained deacon in September.



Finding the Path: Buddhist Monastic Life

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan

From its beginnings 2,500 years ago in Northern India, Buddhism has had monasticism at its heart, as it is based upon the way of life of Shakyamuni Buddha. Here at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey we are part of the Soto Zen school, a tradition that emphasises a particular form of meditation known as *zazen* or sitting meditation. Our monastic practice has its roots in ancient India, but has been through some modification both in China and Japan. Now that development continues as Zen becomes established in Western cultures.



Monks (men and women) and lay people during meditation at Throssel Hole Abbey.

In a monastic time scale we are in the early stages of becoming established in the West. My Master was Rev. Ji-yu-Kennett, an English woman who trained in Japan and then, with the backing of the tradition, went to the US where she founded Shasta Abbey in Northern California and not long afterwards in 1972, Throssel Hole Abbey in Northumberland, UK. She went on to found our Order, The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, before her death in 1996. Today there are temples and monasteries in the US, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. Each temple or monastery operates independently within the Order and is free to develop its own style of teaching within the overall structure and rules of the Order.

We have an active lay congregation who support the monastery and have established local meditation groups which are visited regularly by monks from Throssel. There are also six other smaller temples of our Order around the country. Those who become monks (we use the same term for men and women) will have learned the basics of meditation practice and been part of this congregation for at least a couple of years. The first step is to become a postulant for about a year. Postulants wear similar

robes to the monks, shave their heads and live with the community, although they do not enter the monks' meditation hall until they have been ordained.

At the heart of the Zen tradition is the master disciple relationship; we gather around a particular teacher just as in ancient India monks gathered around the Buddha. This relationship centres on receiving the transmission of the Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha, but in this context it means something far more than doctrines and practices. They are the foundations, but transmission is a meeting heart to heart, a deep sharing and mutual recognition that both master and disciple share in the Buddha nature. Receiving transmission marks the end of one's time as a novice, which today averages about five years. The transmission is given when the disciple is ready, rather than it being the outcome of a set curriculum or examination. It is a very personal matter and it marks a lifetime commitment to the relationship with the master.

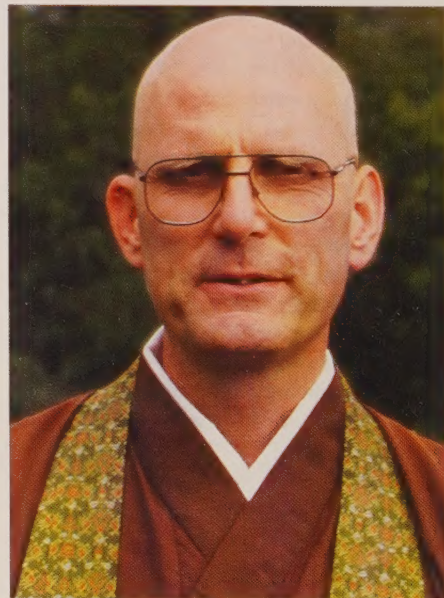
Our way of teaching is practical rather than academic. Within the moral precepts, one needs to say yes to whatever comes, whether agreeable or not, and to sit still beneath praise or blame. As human beings though, justifying ourselves often feels like a matter

of life and death. To say yes, to bow, and go on without looking back is the sign of a true monk. It is amazing how subtle complaint can be, how adept at appearing reasonable and completely justified. While the monastery and one's seniors may not be perfect, it is the training of the monk to look to their own mind, where they can renounce greed, anger and delusion, and not concern themselves with other's faults. In this way one learns not to condemn others or, indeed, oneself. It is a vital aspect of meditation to sit still and accept whatever appears within the mind. This is necessary, if one would see what is truly there without the covering of opinions, beliefs and fantasies.

For much of the year there is personal instruction with the Abbot each week in the form of an interview. One week there is a private interview and the next week it is held with the community present, each monk having the chance to question in turn. In both forms, the monk asks the Abbot a question or makes a statement that somehow reflects their religious training at that moment. The dialogue is kept brief and to the point. A typical question might be, "How can I really give when I am afraid?" The answer might come, "Accept the fear." Finding the honest question and trusting oneself to ask it in the moment brings much of the benefit.

A lot of teaching also takes place during periods of work. For the new novice, the seemingly constant correction and reminders can at times be hard. Novices and younger seniors sleep communally in the meditation hall, where screens are erected at night to provide separate places for men and women. The lack of privacy, not having your own door to close at the end of the day, means it is hard to find an escape. We have to be

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Rev. Master Daishin is the Abbot of Throssel Hole Abbey in Northumberland.

Continued from page 4

careful that people are benefiting from what at times can be a pressure cooker. Sometimes it may feel that no matter what one does, it never seems to come out right. One has to ask oneself, "What am I really seeking?" Deep down there is a sincere wish to respond to the call that is at the heart of life, but in practice we often seek for approval, for reassurance and to be loved. It gets painful as these aspects start to be uncovered. One can feel quite trapped for a while. All this may take several years to work through and aspects of it may continue for much longer than that, but a significant change takes place when the monk says a very deep "Yes" and is able to give him/herself over to the process with much less of a fight. To let go and really trust that which is found in the depth of the meditation is to begin to actualise the potential for enlightenment which we call the Buddha nature, or the nature of things as they really are.

Faith plays a central role. For us it is the willingness to trust oneself utterly to one's life. It is encapsulated in meditation when one trusts oneself to the silence through a deep renunciation. In our minds we generate reassurance when in doubt, fantasies when bored and justification when offended. The path of faith is to let one's feelings be without further comment; to just be still with them. It is the willingness to simply be with oneself as one is without condemnation or excuse. This acceptance is the basis of our life together as a community. Correctly understood, meditation brings a dynamic quality to one's life. For example, to really see one's anger gives rise to compassion and a longing to go on, if one refrains from trying to make the anger go away and does not indulge it. It has a message, a need, that is hard to hear within all the noise it creates. When one does let go, then nothing is lacking. If one realises this, then the path is found and gradually the knots begin to dissolve. *f*



Christopher John SSF visiting a Zen monastery in Korea.

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*

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*

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Tasting Zen: The Tenth East-West Spiritual Exchange, 2005

Sister Lucy M Brydon

The Spiritual Exchanges have been taking place since 1979 when the first group of fifty Japanese Zen monks and nuns came to Europe. This year nine of us were fortunate enough to take part, two Dominicans and seven Benedictines/Cistercians. We went as representatives of the following countries: UK, USA, France, Portugal, Holland, Norway. As a group we learned to build community together and that in itself was a good experience for people who had never met before or only briefly and immediately had to be ready to share everything.

We also varied a great deal in age, religious background, experience of inter-religious dialogue and attitude towards it. It was a very interesting experiment in community-building as we faced strange food (rice every meal, 'miso' soup and pickled everything) and strange customs (e.g. offering food and drink to the departed; communal bathing; the *keisaku* or stick of encouragement) and a very challenging daily time-table.

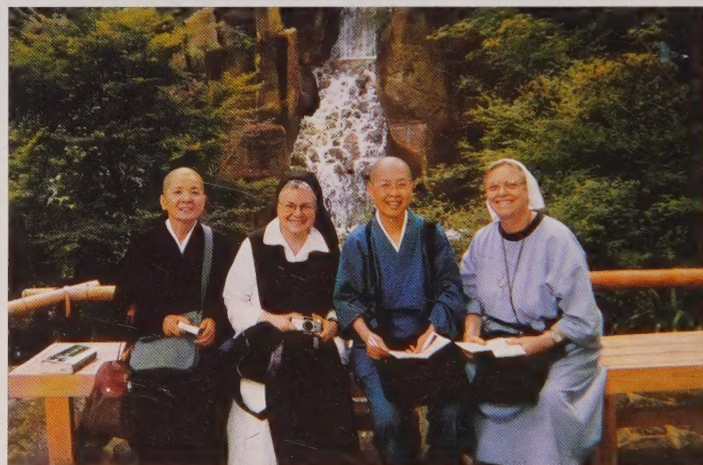
Our hosts were the Zen Faculty of the Hanazono University of Kyoto, and the individual monastic communities who welcomed us. The organisation of our visit was impeccable and utterly generous. We were escorted everywhere, and had interpreters at hand to help us out all the time. We were able to experience life in both Rinzai and Soto Zen monasteries, and we paid a day visit to a temple of the Tendai sect, too. Travelling from one place to another we had the chance to see quite a lot of Japan's largest island (two of our group also went to the monastery of Zuio-ji on the island of Shikoku) and to experience the enviable railway system of Japan and the kindness and efficiency of ordinary citizens and workers. We (women) were greatly taken by the smart uniform of taxi drivers and ticket collectors on trains: elegant suits, peaked caps, and white gloves - and by the lace antimacassars in taxis, and the feather dusters the taxi drivers kept in the boot of their cars, and used while awaiting new passengers! Pronouncing our names posed difficulties and "Lucy" soon became "Rusi-san", 'san' being the honorific suffix.

Immediately after our arrival (after a 14



Sister Lucy is an Olivetan Benedictine of Turvey Abbey, and presently Convenor of the Monastic Interfaith Dialogue Commission of Britain & Ireland.

hour flight and a 3 hour coach journey) we went into retreat (*Osesshin*, the great retreat) at the monastery of Sogen-ji. The trainees were all western here, and only the Roshi (Teacher and Head Priest) was Japanese. It was a gruelling and challenging time-table for us, feeling rather adrift in a strange culture and country, and jet-lagged as well. But we all agreed we would not have missed it for anything. Our day began at 3.15 a.m. (if you wanted coffee first!) and the first



Buddhist and Christian nuns share a lighter part of the Exchange, with a visit to Tokugawa Gardens

session of Choka (chant) at 4.00 a.m. After that it was Zazen (meditation) and chanting for most of the day until 10.00 p.m. We were fortunate to have time off for our own *Missa* (Mass) which we celebrated in the guest-house, and some free time to rest in the afternoon. By 5.00 p.m. we were again on our cushions for Zazen until 9.00 p.m. with a welcome cup of pickled plum tea and a sweet cake before the final Zazen session which we had outside in a more informal setting. Before leaving we were privileged to have a group meeting with the Roshi and interpreter, something he had not done for the previous exchange groups.

After that, the visits to other monasteries were less formal for us. The nuns' community was Soto Zen and they welcomed us as sisters and included us in their work, chanting and prayer. We were privileged to be present for an important Precept-Taking ceremony presided over by the Abbess, Shundo Aoyama who is a priest

with her own temple as well as Abbess of the training monastery we stayed in. We also took part in a Dharma Debate when we shared Christian and Buddhist teachings on prayer and the interior life, and we took part in other less profound experiences e.g. a calligraphy session, a Buddhist hymn-singing session, and of course preparing meals. We gave a (greatly appreciated) Western-style meal to the community before we left. We managed to fit in an exhilarating day of sight-seeing in Nagoya. The other Soto Zen monastery was a very ancient one, founded by Dogen Zenji himself in the thirteenth century. Situated in a most beautiful valley surrounded by high, wooded mountains it was an idyllic setting amid enormous ancient cedar trees. To get to the Dharma Hall where the 5.00 a.m. chanting took place (after an hour of zazen in the Guest Zendo, on the fourth floor of the guest

house), we climbed in single file behind our 'guardian angel' 200 steps, quite an experience in the early morning. At this entirely male monastery, they had 273 trainees and 30 monk-priests to train them. While we were there, they regularly had over 200 guests each night. I felt sorry for the cooks, but they coped

brilliantly, and the meals they presented to us Christian monks and nuns (in our separate refectory) were masterpieces of Japanese cuisine, and art - a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach! We were only there three full days but it felt a very full and rounded experience, more like a month!

The final part of our stay was in Kyoto, where we had also touched base after each visit to a monastery. We had a formal Symposium in the presence of Japan's leading Roshis. Members of our group gave a presentation about the monasteries we had stayed in; and there were keynote speeches from the Japanese and European DIM/MID organisers. It all ended with a very moving memorial service for Pope John Paul II, conducted by one of the Roshis, with chanting, prostrations and bells and gongs. This was followed by a concelebrated Mass with the Bishop of Kyoto, after which there was a splendid farewell banquet for all of us

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Minister's Letter

Sister Helen Julian CSF
Minister Provincial of the First Order Sisters,
European Province, writes:

Dear Friends,

I'm beginning to feel like David Attenborough. Not that I'm off looking for gorillas to play with! But David Attenborough has recently concluded that global warming is real, and that our human influence is helping to bring it about. And I've recently concluded that the threat to the future of religious life in Britain is real.

David Attenborough was convinced by two graphs - one of the earth's surface temperature, and one of carbon dioxide concentrations - and by the coincidence of the curves of both with the growth of human population and industrialisation. I was convinced by a pie chart of the size of Anglican religious communities in England, which showed that more than half - 53% to be exact - have fewer than 10 members. Only 18% have more than 20, and thankfully this at present includes both CSF and SSF.

And this is not just an Anglican phenomenon. Catholic Poor Clare communities in Britain show almost exactly the same pattern; 53% with fewer than 10 sisters, 40% with 10 to 19, and only one community with more than 20.

So perhaps it seems perverse that this September the members of C/SSF will be gathering for our General Chapter under the title 'A Future with Hope'. Surely a workshop on dying gracefully would be more appropriate?

And yet ... The impulse to religious life, to that total commitment which one of the participants in the BBC2 programme 'The

Monastery' called 'either truly sane or absolutely bonkers', is a universal one. The articles in this edition of *franciscan* show the truth of this from a Buddhist perspective. The unexpected success of programmes like 'The Monastery' and its follow up 'The Convent' attests, I think, to more than just a fascination with what goes on 'behind the walls'. Many people who would not call themselves believers, very sceptical of organised religion of any description, yet have a desire for 'more', for something beyond the everyday, the tangible and material. It seems to be in our DNA. And part of the lure of religious life is that it offers a life based on that 'beyond'.

As Sr Aelred of Arundel, the Poor Clare house where 'The Convent' was filmed, said in an interview in *The Tablet*, 'To refuse might have been to chicken out of an important opportunity of enlightening people who have some spiritual hunger, some openness to values other than the current ones.' And she spoke of working with the four women 'to God's agenda ... We wanted to give them a sense ... that the best things are invisible, and that there is a God who loves them unconditionally.'

So, perhaps most of the present Anglican communities in the UK will die, hopefully with some grace. But the urge which brought them into being will not die, and can find new ways of expression.

Global warming is real; the decline of religious life in our country is real. But neither is inevitable, and neither means that God has abandoned us. The future is in God's hands, but we are called to co-operate



with God in creating it. For the planet that means reining in our desire for more of the material. As Franciscans, committed to a reverence for creation and joy in simplicity, we have a real gift to offer to a world threatened by the results of our thoughtless use of the world's resources. For the religious life it means allowing ourselves to believe 'that the best things are invisible, and that there is a God who loves us unconditionally.' And following that desire, deeply implanted in us, for what is 'beyond'. That is at the heart of a 'Future with Hope', and why, after all, I don't believe that the statistics of decline will have the last word. Please pray for us as we meet in the General Chapter, that we may be open to God's vision of our future, and bold in following it.

Pax et Bonum

Helen Julian CSF

Continued from page 6

and invited guests.

We returned home the following day. Speaking for myself, it was a most amazing experience. I still have not processed and integrated it at any very deep level except perhaps to be aware of the joy of being in Christ. I also had a strong sense that the Zen monks and nuns and ourselves were sharing a journey towards the Real and *in* the Real. I would be happy to say "in God" about the kind of experience we share even though our approach differs. My overwhelming feeling is of amazement and gratitude for the whole opportunity, for the very different people in our group, together forming community for a month, and for the warm and generous welcome, kindness, compassion and hospitality we received from our Japanese hosts. Explaining the experience to my community and other interested friends has helped to put it in perspective somewhat but I still feel like one of the priests who went in the 1980s, who said it would take him a lifetime to understand what the whole thing really meant. f

Theme Reflection



**Transform anger with kindness
 and evil with good,
 meanness with generosity
 and deceit with integrity.**

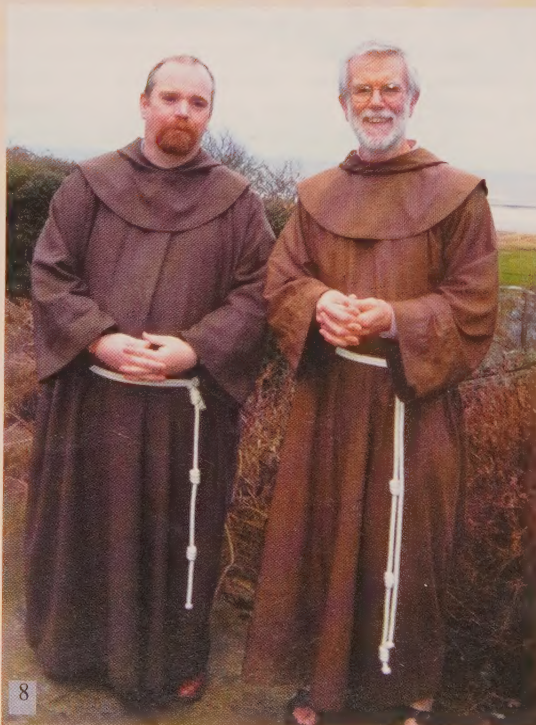
**These three ways lead to the heavens:
 asserting the truth,
 not yielding to anger,
 and giving, even if you have only a little to share.**

Words of the Buddha
 (Dhammapada 223 & 224) Translated by Ajahn Munindo

The Holy Island

For centuries Holy Island has been a place of pilgrimage and (1) today pilgrims walk across the sands in ever greater numbers following the Pilgrims' Way. Why do they come? What draws them? This island, a Cradle of Christianity for England, (2 and 3) became the home of Aidan and Cuthbert to name but two of our local saints. (4) St Cuthbert's Island was used by later saints as a hermitage and prayer still continues in (5) the oldest used building on the island, the Parish Church of St Mary, where **Damian** came as Vicar some three years ago. The island is not just a place for pilgrims and tourists: there is still a small village community here (6) supporting itself through the industry and ministry of hospitality and (7) through inshore fishing for lobsters and crabs. It is in this small community that (8) **Robert Coombes** and **Damian** live. The Priory stands elegantly in its ruins (9 and 10), but it is still a place of God. Its stones were taken towards the building of the castle (11).

The Island with its hustle and bustle of summer and the peace of winter still talks, as it spoke to those early monks, for those who take time to listen.



of Lindisfarne



Community Routes



David Jardine is on the right; his companion is Eric Lewis.

◆ ◆ Holy Week in the Arctic

The small town of Pangnirtung on Baffin Island in the Diocese of the Arctic was where **David Jardine** and some of his healing team from Belfast conducted a Holy Week series this year. It may seem an unlikely venue. The reason they were there is that one of their team, Rev. Darren McCartney, has been rector of St. Luke's Church in that town for the last three years.

The team started to prepare and to pray, a full year in advance. That was absolutely essential. Facing temperatures of 30° below zero it was important to have the right equipment, or they would have perished. These harsh conditions highlighted for the team the enormous sacrifices made by early missionaries one hundred years ago in bringing the Gospel message to that part of the world. They obviously did a good job because there was real freedom in the worship in St. Luke's Church, and the team from Ireland were given a great welcome. Archibald Fleming, first Bishop of the Arctic, said, 'The Arctic is a cold and cruel country, but there is nothing as warm as the clasp of an Eskimo's hand'.

Each morning was spent with students in the theological college, sharing on the subject of divine healing. In the evening there were Holy Week services, followed by prayer for healing. These services always lasted three or four hours.

For **David Jardine** one of the most moving moments came right at the beginning of the week. He was brought up in the town of Banbridge in Northern Ireland, the same town as Joseph Scriven, author of the hymn 'What a friend we have in Jesus'. That was

the hymn which the theological students chose to sing in the Inuktitut language at the beginning of the first teaching session. For David it was a proud and moving moment, and helped set the scene for a wonderful week.



African Adventures: Joyce

For part of March, April and May this year, **Joyce** had the opportunity to visit Swaziland, Johannesburg (South Africa) and Ghana. This was made possible because of an invitation from the sisters of the Order of the Holy Paraclete (OHP) to be part of their Visitation team and the lot fell to her to visit their African houses. Though this was her primary task, while there she was delighted that it was possible to fit in meetings with some SSF Tertiaries in Johannesburg, Kumasi and Accra and she was grateful for the warm welcome she received and the generous hospitality given to her.

One of the highlights for her was to see the Jacaranda Project in Bulembu set up by the OHP sisters in Swaziland, which is the African country with the highest percentage of its population affected by HIV/AIDS. Some of the young girls of the Project have been orphaned by the pandemic, others have been traumatised by abuse but they are the lucky ones who now have love and care and are safe.

She was acutely aware of the poverty in all three countries, of the huge gap between the rich and the poor; but also of the immense generosity of the poor whose spirit was not crushed, whose Christian faith was vibrant and exuberant. While in Johannesburg, a visit to Finetown township on Sunday, was an unforgettable experience of such enthusiasm with so little in the way of structure; the church was a small tin-roofed shed, packed

wall to wall with worshippers singing their hearts out to God in a variety of African languages as well as English, and the distribution of communion having to take place outside as there was no room inside!

In Ghana she was particularly amused by the names of some of the market stalls: God is Able Special Rice Stew, Great Provider Fashion Centre, The Lord is My Shepherd Shoemaking and My Lord is Able Cement. Apart from visiting the OHP sisters in Jackie, near Kumasi, there was the chance to visit Marjorie OHP in Bolgatanga, in the north-east near the border with Burkina Faso. The drive from Kumasi to Bolga took six and a half hours, in an air conditioned minibus, driven by a Ghanaian Jehu! However, here Joyce had the opportunity to see some of the work of the Anglican Mission, pioneered by OHP in earlier years, and now being done by local people and others. Especially of interest to her was the outreach to women in the villages, teaching them energy efficient ways of cooking, as well as how to trade and thus empowering them economically, which she saw firsthand in an outing to some of these villages.

For this amazing educational experience, Joyce is indebted to the OHP sisters.

◆ Samuel

The Tanzara Railway must be counted as one of the great train journeys of the world: built by the Chinese in the early 1970s to connect Central Africa with the sea it takes nearly two days to rumble and shake its way the eleven hundred miles from Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia to Dar es Salaam on the East African Coast. This was but one leg of a five week trip to Africa during Lent. No matter that the carriages haven't seen much of a refit in thirty five years or that the loos weren't quite up to scratch; no matter that



Joyce with tertiaries in Kumasi, Ghana with St Cyprian's Cathedral in the background.

beside the track were littered the remains of those trains which haven't quite made it, or that we eventually arrived in Dar twelve hours behind schedule, it provided a companionship of passengers, a keenness of service (the beef curry was excellent) and a variety of scenery that could not be matched even by Virgin Express. At either end, with a few more bus and landrover adventures, there were friendly tertiaries in South Africa and Lesotho, the brothers of the Community of Divine Compassion faithfully living their Franciscan vocation amongst the huge current problems of Zimbabwe, and **James Anthony** overseeing the life of St Cyprian's College, Rondo, in the far south of Tanzania. If you are thinking of going to any these places I would recommend the train!

◆ ◆ On Fire

Helen Julian writes:

Eucharists with incense, candles, singing in tongues and waiting on the Spirit. Benediction followed by prayer ministry. Just part of the glorious riches of the annual On Fire conference at High Leigh in Hertfordshire. On Fire used to be called Anglo-Catholic Renewal; its purpose is to bring the Charismatic renewal alive in the church, especially the Catholic wing of the Church of England.

The conference is the main work of the committee, of which I've been a member for the last three years. It brings together people from many parts of the church, and from other churches too, to listen to guest speakers, and take part in workshops, to worship together, to receive and offer ministry, and to enjoy times of fellowship over meals, in the bar, and in the beautiful grounds of High Leigh. A smaller conference twice a year in Glastonbury has the same pattern and draws participants from all over the southwest.

The combination of word and sacrament in the power of the Spirit is a powerful one, and I've been greatly enriched by my times at

High Leigh over the years. Next year's conference runs from 23 to 26 April; if you want to find out more, contact me at Compton Durville, or go to the website, www.acr-onfire.com.

◆ ◆ Chairs? Cheers!

The chapel chairs at Compton Durville have been the focus of much deliberation of recent years, and an informal appeal was launched at the Open Day in 2005 to raise funds to replace the old wooden ones which had done sterling service. Thanks to the generosity of many, about a year later Delivery Day occurred on 6 June.

◆ ◆ Hilfield Peace and Environment Project

The first phase of the refurbishment of Hilfield Friary has now been completed, and the buildings were dedicated on 8 June by the Bishop of Sherborne. The refurbishment has involved moving all the permanent residents into the buildings surrounding the main courtyard and also providing space in those buildings for up to ten short-term guests, thus freeing up the remaining buildings for which ambitious and exciting plans are being developed. The Friary will seek to share the vision of fraternity by creating on the site the "Hilfield Peace and



Phyllis, Helen Julian and Beverley: movers and shakers?

Environment Project". Some of the hopes for the Project are that it may become a place where:

"people and communities of all descriptions can come together to overcome conflicts and to work for deeper understanding;

"facilities are provided for people to explore and learn about a peaceful relationship with the environment and the planet on which we live;

"Christians may work at issues that divide them;

"individuals can have an opportunity for prayer, study and reflection."

The Project will be developed on an incremental basis, over a three year period, so that there will eventually be self-catering accommodation for up to 30 people, as well as meeting rooms. The facilities of the Friary, such as the chapel, will be available to guests.

Approaches are being made to potential visitors such as inter-faith groups, nature conservation bodies, young peoples' organisations and others. The first small group arrived in early May, and more are expected later in the year.

◆ ◆ Round up

Jennifer Chan began a two-year secondment in her home diocese of Sarawak in July. **Polly Mcartney** was recieved as a novice on 29 July. **Maggie and Lynne**, from the Province of the Americas will be spending time in the UK - **Maggie** arrived in July and after a brief visit to First Order sisters, will spend five months with the sisters at Freeland; **Lynne** will arrive in September for a year's study at Cuddesdon Theological College.

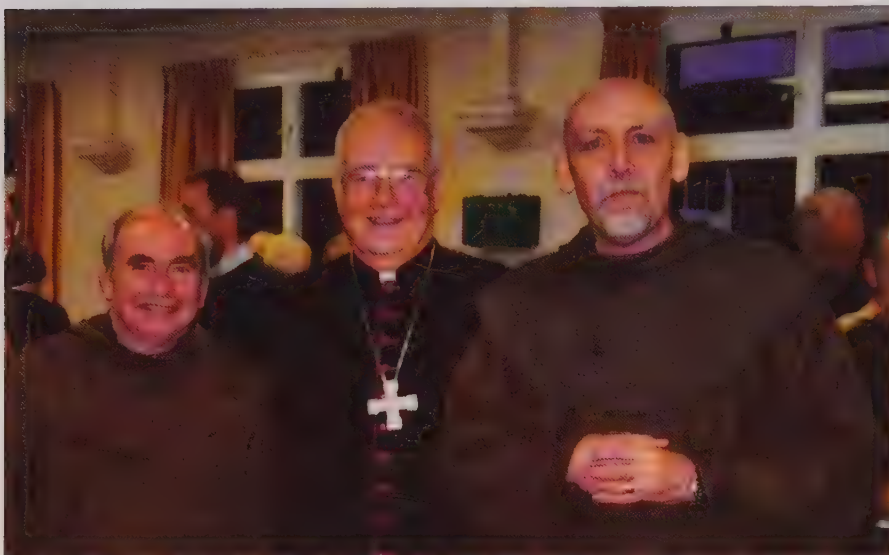
Alan Michael and Nicholas Alan were both ordained Deacon on Sunday 2nd July in the cathedral churches of the dioceses in which they are to serve, **Alan Michael** in Birmingham and **Nicholas Alan** in Worcester. **Kevin** has completed his studies for ordination and is expected to be ordained Deacon at the ordination for Salisbury Diocese this autumn. /



Leo House, one of the buildings rededicated at Hilfield Friary on 8 June 2006, during the Brothers' Annual Meeting

House Up-date: Doncaster

Where is 'the North'? If you live north of the Tyne, it's difficult to think of Yorkshire as being in 'the North'. Yet our 'Northern Area' extends from Holy Island to Doncaster and of course embraces Alnmouth. As we are a Franciscan family it's right that in that area are to be found presences not only in places of holy association, but also of poverty and need - not only places where Christ is present in the beauty of creation and in the joys of hospitality, but in his poor and in that ministry which brings his riches to giver and receiver (and who knows which is which?)



Malcolm, Bishop Jack Nicholls and Paul Anthony after the licensing of the brothers for ministry in Bentley parish.

The Northern Area reached its present shape about three years ago when Damian became vicar of Holy Island (see our centrefold) and with Robert Coombes, set up house in the vicarage there. In Sheffield Diocese (where formerly brothers lived a life primarily of prayer at Burghwallis), Malcolm and Paul Anthony, later to be joined by Nathanael, minister in the parish of St Peter, Bentley, just north (!) of Doncaster. Let them speak for themselves.

Our first priority is our prayer and life together and we hope that the ministry flows from these things.

MALCOLM By a strange coincidence I began writing this on 22 May, the third anniversary of our arrival and the beginning of our Society's ministry in Bentley. How quickly time has passed, how much has happened, how conscious we are of all the blessings we have received.

The 'village' of Bentley is a former mining village three miles north of Doncaster. The people have a strong sense of identity and are welcoming and accepting of newcomers. Always referred to as 'the Village', it is in

fact very large with a population of almost 10,000. Unemployment is high and there are a lot of youngsters with very little to do, and of course the usual range of problems. A lot of good caring work is done, much of it by volunteers.

From the very first day we were made welcome and soon felt at home. The vicarage had been well cared for by the parish and is a lovely place to live. There was a lot of curiosity and interest in who those 'brown brothers' were and what they would be doing. St Peter's Church had been in interregnum for almost two years and the faithful and loving congregation had worked hard to maintain the life and worship. They took us to their hearts from the very beginning and we are greatly blessed.

Parish ministry is interesting and varied, there is always plenty to do. Our first priority is our prayer and life together and we hope that the ministry flows from these things. Although churchgoing is not the most popular occupation in Bentley there is a tremendous amount of goodwill for the church. We receive a lot of requests for baptisms and weddings and try to use these occasions as opportunities

for wider evangelism.

We are fully involved in the life of the deanery and I am on the Standing Committee. Sometimes we minister outside the parish, leading Quiet Days, preaching, and talking to groups.

We seek through our Franciscan living to share the gospel and to be a witness to God's reconciling love.

As a community of brothers we feel very privileged to share in the life of the wider community. We seek through our Franciscan living to share the gospel and to be a witness to God's reconciling love.

PAUL ANTHONY Last year I suffered a serious illness, consequently my life has had to change substantially.

At the moment I live the 'lesser rule' which means that I attend Morning and Evening Prayer, and the parish Mass on Sundays and Tuesdays. I help with sick communions, and hope that in the future I will be able to live a full and active life once more.

The garden at Bentley is vast - built on what was a tennis court. It takes a lot of my time. I also like cooking. Most of the cooking is shared, but I cook when no one else is available.

NATHANAEL From Enlli to Bentley, from the Province of the Church in Wales to the Province of York in the Church of England. I experienced a culture shock!

However, after almost twelve months it's true to say, using a Bentleyite phrase, 'We're getting there.' J



Nathanael: this photo was taken on Bardsey Island

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Book Reviews

Two ISBN numbers are given in this edition as from January 2007 the 13 digit numbers will be required when ordering books.

Andrew Wingate

Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful How to Live in a Multi-Faith World

ISBN 0 232 52532 3

or 9780 232 52532 8

D.L.T., 2005, £12.95

The author of this useful book is the Bishop of Leicester's Advisor in Inter-Faith Relations. It addresses the problems Christians may have about people of other faiths. It would be useful for parish groups to use as well as for individuals. There are no clear answers, but plenty of material for reflection. It explains Hinduism, Islam, and other 'world' religions in terms that anyone can follow, and gives us questions at the end of each section, all to aid our understanding of fellow-citizens, and anticipates what our reactions might be.

The author is well informed and an enthusiastic promoter of dialogue between members of various faith communities. He is not afraid to point to similarities as well as to differences of view point.

If any reader of *franciscan* has not yet embarked on the adventure of learning what others faiths are about, this book is a very good start. Wingate does not talk down to anyone, but gently leads us to consider pastoral problems and opportunities, social issues, and whether we can pray together with, say, Hindus or Muslims. The book is a must for anyone who tries to work out the implications of living near, with or among people of other religions. Its simplicity is a real mark of the author's pastoral insight and his informed passion for dialogue.

Thomas Anthony SSF

Judith Pinnington

Anglicans and Orthodox

Unity and Subversion 1559 - 1725

ISBN 85244 577 6

or 9780 85244 577 8

Gracewing, 2003, £14.99

Cultural differences between English people and those who belong to the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches are such that Anglicans are far more likely to look west than to look east when they begin to get serious about the prospects of Christian unity.

However, in the period following the Reformation in the 16th century Anglicans of the 'high church' tradition took a great interest in Orthodoxy. Many thinking people of that period regarded the Orthodox churches as representing a form of 'non Papal Catholicism', and therefore potentially having much in common with Anglicans.

This book gives a detailed account of the ways in which Anglicans and Orthodox reached out towards one another during the period under consideration. It is presented in a very readable style, and we are given many

insights into the theology and ways of worship of the period.

The author is herself an Orthodox believer, and she has made a study of Anglicanism. She highlights the measure of agreement, but she does not underestimate the difficulties along the path. The general trend of the book illustrates that there was far more interest in the subject on the Anglican side than on that of the Orthodox. Certainly the Nonjurors (who were unable in conscience to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary) had hoped that some form of inter-communion with the Greek Church could have been allowed, but their longings never found acceptance.

The book points out that the Orthodox found the absence of monasteries in the Church of England during the period difficult to comprehend. The differences in spirituality are noted, as also the disparity in Eucharistic doctrine, though Anglicans of the period were themselves divided as to the nature of the 'real presence' of Christ in the Sacrament (as they continue to be!).

There are several intriguing pieces of information in the book, ranging from the fact that it was a seventeenth century Archbishop of Smyrna who introduced the habit of coffee drinking into Oxford when he was studying at Balliol College, to the practice of confession and absolution in the Greek Church, where apparently during the period 'labouring and common people' were expected to confess once annually, while those with 'leisure and convenience of living' should confess four times in the year. One wonders what Saint Francis would have made of that!

We are told that during the seventeenth century there is no evidence of any effort to enlighten Anglicans on the beliefs and practices of the Orthodox. Even today, there is far too much ignorance on the part of most of us. Judith Pinnington's book will enable us to redress the balance.

Martin SSF

Janet Morley (Ed)

Bread of Tomorrow

Praying with the World's Poor

ISBN 0 281 05698 6

or 9780 281 05698 9

SPCK, £11.99, Reprinted 2004

This anthology of intercessory prayer was first published in Great Britain in 1992. The cover illustration of this latest re-print catches the eye with that vividly colourful rendition of 'The Supper, Hope for the Marginalized', by Sieger Korder, a perfect choice for a collection of prayers focused on and written largely by those pushed to the edges of our world's societies.

Bread of Tomorrow gathers prayers from many nations. The preface poses and offers answers to reflective questions about the nature of petitionary prayer: What do we pray for and where do we pray from? How and why and to whom do we pray?

The material in this anthology is broadly arranged according to the Church's liturgical seasons. It reveals how each particular

liturgical cycle can address the concern to strengthen the poor. The preface describes prayer for the poor as "central to what the Church is for" yet warns against such prayer when it is isolated from or merely an alternative to concrete action that strives to alleviate poverty.

Anyone looking for either solitary or communal contemporary forms of intercessory prayer with a special concern for the poor will find here a moving and valuable resource. **Catherine Joy CSF**

Helen Oppenheimer

Profitable Wonders

ISBN 0 334 02924 4

or 9780 334 02924 3

SCM Press, 2003, £14.99

Helen Oppenheimer is well known as a prolific writer and lecturer on moral and philosophical theology and a former President of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics. She has served on half a dozen Anglican commissions and is the holder of a Lambeth DD. This book is a collection of poetry and prose pieces culled from her wide reading over the past sixty years. The title is taken from a phrase of Thomas Traherne. As she describes her choices: 'Some of the pieces are serious and some more lighthearted. Some of them are more wonderful and some more profitable, but most have something of both profit and wonder about them. Each one says something which matters to me'. While pretending to no great erudition she includes pieces in French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek (mercifully with translations in every case). The book, she says, is addressed to Christians and fringe believers. It makes a glorious feast, and the more slowly it is digested the more it will be enjoyed.

Like Lord Wavell's *Other Men's Flowers* this book is arranged thematically and a list of the sections gives a good idea of its scope: Faith, Creation, Humanity, Mercy, Grace, Dying and Rising. Apart from the Psalmists (in the Coverdale version) and Saint Paul, her favourite authors are Augustine of

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Hippo, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Traherne, Robert Browning, Edwin Muir, C.S.Lewis and Austin Farrer. No surprises there. But hidden in the crannies there are some more exotic flavours, some to shock and some to make one laugh aloud. There is evidence in some juxtapositions of a wicked sense of humour. Lady Oppenheimer hopes the book will appeal to those who care about language and thrive on words. In that it cannot fail. For me it will be compulsive bed-time reading over many months to come.

Hugh Beach TSSF

Susan Leslie (Susan Elisabeth OSC)

Great Little Doctor

The Teaching of St Thérèse of Lisieux

ISBN 085439 712 4

or 9780 85439 712 9

St Paul's Publishing, 2005, £6.50

Perhaps, like me, you were surprised when St Thérèse of Lisieux was declared a Doctor of the Church. Sister Susan outlines what was done by the two other women Doctors, St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa of Avila, who both did great things in the Church, so that we can see how amazing it is that a 24 year-old woman, in the sheltered life of a 19th Century Convent could be in the same category. It is admirably revealed to the reader that Thérèse is well able to show people an entirely new, yet simple, way of growing into sanctity. She teaches by constantly seeking God in everything that she did and that happened to her in her life's ordinary circumstances, such as are experienced by everyone. We learn from this little book how to turn them into stepping stones to God. There is nothing of the sentimental aspect of 'The Little Flower'. Sister Susan reveals a tough young woman who learns to use her weakness as a highway to God. At the end of her life the pain of her physical illness was surpassed by the suffering of a terrible Dark Night of faith. Sister Susan shows that there were no heroics about both these sufferings. She seizes on the use Thérèse made of her imagination to try to come to terms with this inner pain by comparing herself to a bird soaked by a storm, but which knows that the sun is behind it all. This is a typical Thérésian image: the apparent sentimentality of a dear little bird caught in the rain, hides the profoundly demanding reality of faith exercised in darkness and abandonment. Both those who love St Thérèse and those coming fresh to her, will be much enriched by this book.

Sister Clare Agnes OSC, Arundel

Michael Ford (Ed)

The Dance of Life

Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen

ISBN 0 232 52605 2

or 9780 232 52605 9

D.L.T., 2005, £8.95

This book is designed to be a companion on the journey of faith. It is attractively presented, and it will be of great benefit if used devotionally. The subtitle may perhaps

give the impression that it is a manual for spiritual directors, but it is in fact intended for a much wider readership. It is a rich anthology of spiritual readings, drawn from the writings of the Dutch priest Henri Nouwen, who is probably best known to English readers as the author of 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

The editor has selected passages from 27 books by Fr.Nouwen, in order to provide content for consideration relating to various stages and crises in the life of a Christian. The themes include coping with anxiety, emotional loneliness, and 'befriending death', as well as other hurdles encountered in the spiritual pilgrimage.

Throughout the book the reader will find a penetrating understanding of human nature, and most people will discover that many of the passages will speak directly to their own condition. Fr Nouwen writes from a psychological perspective, and yet he is refreshingly Christocentric. He emphasises the need for inner silence and the contemplation of Jesus.

Three brief quotations will illustrate something of the flavour of the book:-

"Fear is the great enemy of intimacy. Fear makes us run away from each other or cling to each other but does not create true intimacy."

"Joy is hidden in sorrow and sorrow in joy. If we try to avoid sorrow at all costs, we may never taste joy."

"A spiritual life in the midst of our energy-draining society requires us to take conscious steps to safeguard that inner space where we can keep our eyes fixed on the beauty of the Lord."

The whole book is a treasure of spiritual riches. It needs to be read slowly and meditatively, and to be inwardly digested over a period of time.

Martin SSF

James Woodward

Befriending Death

ISBN 0 281 05370 7

or 9780 281 05370 4

SPCK, 2005, £8.99

'By Death, our sister, praised be,

From whom no one alive can flee',

sang Francis as death approached.

In this short book James Woodward sets out to rob Sister Death of the various disguises with which, in our ignorance, fear, denial and confusion, we have clothed her. The book itself occupies 75 pages - the remaining 46 consist of appendices and bibliography.

Ch.1 explores the theme; the reader is invited to participate by means of pondering questions, and doing a simple exercise. Ch.2 relates spirituality and dying. Ch.3 is perhaps the heart of the book and is about listening. Ch.4 - Living while Dying - is for those who live with the knowledge that they are near death. Ch.5 deals with preparation for and facing death, and concludes with an exercise. Ch.6 - Resources from the Tradition, centres on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ch.7 is practical - preparing for one's own funeral,

and Ch.8 gives conclusions

This book pulls no punches, it calls a spade a spade. At the same time it is written with sensitivity, and the overall effect is to provide light and reassurance. Particularly valuable are the appendices - 'What to do after a death', and 'Information and resources'.

On the back cover we read that 'This book is addressed to the Christian reader'...This should include the multitudes for whom 'Christianity' is a faded memory, or a deeply buried and general apprehension, rather than a living faith - for they, too, as death approaches, stand in need of the help which this writer offers.

Anselm SSF

Philip Sheldrake (Ed)

The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality

ISBN 0 334 02984 8

or 9780 334 02984 7

SCM, London, 2005, £50 (hardback)

This is a major work in the field of spirituality, edited by one of the leading experts in the study of spirituality in Britain today. After a few brief essays on Spirituality and Culture, Spirituality and Science, etc, there are nearly 600 pages of A-Z entries on the various aspects of Christian spirituality. The articles are short, of only one or two pages each, but end with helpful selections of books suggested for further reading. The authors of the articles have often published works on the themes themselves: such as Richard Woods writing on Dominican Spirituality, or Gordon Mursell on English Spirituality.

The emphasis is clearly on gaining an overview of trends in spirituality rather than providing many historical details, though this is in part necessitated by the brevity of each article. The article on Benedictine Spirituality, for example, gives a synopsis of the Rule, but nothing on Benedict himself or later Benedictine tradition. The article on Ignatian Spirituality is, naturally enough, mostly on Ignatius himself and the Spiritual Exercises, but then there are further links to separate articles on Ignatian themes such as Consolation, Desolation, Examination of Conscience and the Society of Jesus itself. The article on Franciscan Spirituality (by William Short OFM), gives a helpful summary of Franciscan themes such as Incarnation, Creation, Poverty, and Example and Mirror with reference to Clare, but does also include some reflections on later developments - even the SSF gets a brief mention.

Many of the concerns of more recent spiritual writing are well covered here, with entries on Black and Womanist Spiritualities, Body and Spirituality, Postmodernity, relations with other faiths, and even Cyberspace and Spirituality. All in all this is a rich resource of ideas to spark other ideas, and trails to follow up at one's leisure. Not a book for continuous reading, but an ideal companion for idle moments.

Nicholas Alan SSF

A Witness to Peace and Justice in Congo

John SSF

Familiar words from the *Principles of the First Order* concluded Morning Prayer in Hilfield chapel one day last autumn: "The community does not expect ever to have at its disposal many funds for the administration of charitable relief, but it will gladly lend its members in the work of such relief and co-operate with others who are doing it."

Originally drawn to Franciscan community partly by "the call of the poor", to quote Jean Vanier, I spent our half-hour of silent prayer badgering God about how this could be expressed from a Dorset hamlet. That same morning an email arrived appealing for volunteer observers to participate in the first democratic elections for 40 years in Congo (ex-Zaire). Six months later in April, with approval from the community and funding from friends, I was on a plane bound for Kinshasa. Outlook Express had lived up to its name.

Emerging from the maelstrom of Ndjili airport, I was ferried across town on potholed roads past teeming crowds, sprawling shanty-towns and bullet-pocked buildings full of squatters. Marauding militias in the anarchic and mineral-rich eastern provinces have caused Kinshasa's population to soar to up to ten million. Vacant patches of land have been transformed into kitchen gardens in an effort to stave off hunger. Twelve hundred Congolese die each day from the repercussions of violence and malnutrition.

Sharing in an Urgent Peace Project co-ordinated by the Mennonites, I helped to train national volunteers to act as observers at the presidential and legislative elections, postponed until 30 July. Enthusiasm at registering a vote was tempered by

scepticism about the ruling cabal's ability or willingness to share power or indeed to use it at all to benefit anyone but themselves. Congo is entering democracy without democrats. Most will vote out of tribal loyalty.

Opportunities arose to visit church projects targeting some of the social problems

Sharing in an Urgent Peace Project co-ordinated by the Mennonites, I helped to train national volunteers to act as observers at the presidential and legislative elections.

resulting from the breakdown of the famed extended African family, under immense strain from war, disease and extreme poverty. Craftsmen are being helped to market their wood-carvings locally and in North America. The school fees of AIDS orphans are paid to relieve the burden on relatives who have taken them in despite their own lack of resources. This prevents them from swelling the ranks of Kinshasa's 30,000 abandoned street children, often falsely accused of witchcraft and vulnerable to abuse from flourishing so-called deliverance ministries. Sitting with these families in a squalid neighbourhood where few whites ever ventured, I struggled to find words of consolation and encouragement to be translated into Lingala. These were the most haunting pastoral visits of my life,

because of the mixture of gentleness and desperation with which I was welcomed.

At a meeting monitoring the political shenanigans of the electoral process I met Madame Georgette, and invited myself to the orphanage she told me she ran. Beginning five years ago on a plot near the university begrudgingly donated by her father, she provides food, clothing and shelter for an ever-increasing band of children, currently numbering fifty-four. Assisted only by Clement, who lives in the boys' house and, when she can pay, by two teachers, Georgette haphazardly receives sacks of maize flour from the World Food Programme and grows manioc on the hillside. Having grown up in Los Angeles, she has chosen to return to her homeland to devote whatever she can earn from lecturing and occasional consultancy work in economics and development to this all-consuming project. Her dream is to found a school and clinic for these and other local children. Once they realized whatever was hers was theirs, the children ceased to steal and now share in all the decision-making. Never more than in their company have I sensed the truth of Christ's words: "The Kingdom of God is among you."

I became a catalyst for new alliances among Congolese Christians, for whom contact with Western believers is proof that they are not forgotten or abandoned in their search for peace and justice.

The Anglicans are relatively recent arrivals in Kinshasa, having been first established around the Great Lakes. They invited me to preach. The vibrancy and joyful faith of these people who continue to suffer much left a lasting impression. The diocese is run on a shoestring from the bishop's living room while office foundations take shape in his yard.

Thanks to my intrepid African hosts, we managed to track down the Order of Friars Minor at their study house and were welcomed as brothers by the friars there. An unexpected outcome of my journey was that I became a catalyst for new alliances between Congolese Christians of various denominations in their joint search for peace and justice. For them all, contact with Western believers is proof that they are not forgotten or abandoned, and maintains the hope that their struggles may be aided by our advocacy, almsgiving and intercession. Personally, I have discovered a new context in which to respond to "the call of the poor" by loving mercy, acting justly and walking humbly with my God. *f*



John (far right) looks on as some of the children in the orphanage move out of the formal photo line-up and into play time.